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A TECHNICAL SCHOOL IN NAPLES

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One of the most interesting schools in Italy is a commercial and industrial school for girls in Naples. It is named in honor of the Queen Mother, the full title of the institution being "La Scuola Femminile Professionale e di Arti Regina Margherita;" and one has in it a curious instance of the shifting of word-values in transferring terms from one language to another, for the school is not, in the English sense of the words, either a professional or an art school, but a commercial and an industrial one. Perhaps it might reasonably be called a technical school, for the training is much more ambitious than that usually attempted in merely industrial institutions.

The administration of the school presents what seems a curious anomaly, and one for which I was not able to obtain any explanation. "Why attempt to explain a satisfactory fact?" appeared to be the attitude of all connected with the establishment—all of whom the writer made inquiries, at least. The school, although one would think it a very important part of the educational system, is not under the control and direction of the minister of education, but of the minister of industry and commerce instead, and is supported by appropriations by the general government through its Department of Commerce, by the provincial authorities, by the municipality of Naples, and by the Chamber of Commerce of the city of Naples.

It occupies a very beautiful old building, a former convent, situated at No. 4 Largo Santo Mariellino. The brilliant Italian sunshine glows through the stained-glass windows of the spacious chapel upon the heads of gay young girls at their morning assembly, where once the impressive services of the church were held; the walls of the refectory, which heard only the grave accents of some voice reading pious legends of saints and martyrs while the scant repast was served, now listen to expositions of modern commercial practice; stone steps, formerly trodden only by sandaled feet, are climbed

today by the absurd high-heeled boots so dear to the hearts of Italian girls; while the broad portals, once grimly closed upon an unsatisfactory world, now stand open to all who come. The flag of a united Italy floats above the gray old walls, and the Italian eagle watches from his place over the archway of the main entrance like a sentry on guard. Narrow cells have been thrown together to form classrooms; the shelves of storerooms bear the supplies of a twentieth-century industrial school; the halls echo to the click of the telegraph instruments and to the rattle of typewriters, where penitential silence once upon a time reigned absolute; gay fripperies for women's wear and snowy robes for little children lighten the gloomy workrooms; and the embroideries over which young heads bend are for sale to the merry world of Neapolitan fashion, not for the adornment of the altar. The old order has passed, making way for the new; but if "to labor is to pray," perhaps the change is not so profound as it appears.

The aims of the school are frankly and confessedly utilitarian. Girls are trained there for the serious task of earning a living in an overcrowded community. The problem of winning that daily bread—with a little butter on it perhaps, if one is good and industrious—is not the easiest to solve, even in this lucky land; but when one penetrates below the discipline and graceful surface of life in the older countries of this earth, one admires the apparent courage with which those who must live it out to the end face its unpleasant possibilities. The earnings for the masses of the people are so small, the opportunities for providing for that rainy day which even the sunniest life must count upon are so rare, the competition in all lines of industry is so cruelly keen, that the entire question assumes a new aspect to Americans. We almost invariably assent cheerfully to the statement, "He who will not work should not eat," while promising with even greater cheerfulness that he who is willing to work will assuredly eat. But in the crowded communities of Europe, some way, it does not always seem so certain.

However, conscription, which takes the young men of a nation from the accountant's desk, the telegrapher's key, and the book-keeper's ledger, leaves places which women must fill, in many instances; and the Queen Margherita School trains girls to take

these positions. But the more usual feminine handicrafts are taught also, and courses of varying length are given in several different industries. The school is divided into two general sections—one in which instruction in the accepted commercial branches, such as bookkeeping, business arithmetic and correspondence forms telegraphy, and two foreign languages, is given; and the other is the more purely industrial section. In this second division girls are trained in lacemaking, embroidery, the making of artificial flowers, mending, designing as applied to all these trades, and laundry work. In addition to these courses are the studies of the ordinary common-school curriculum, the work prescribed by the Department of Education for the general school system of the nation.

The government of the institution shows immense possibilities, one would think, for various degrees and kinds of conflicts of authority; but to a casual visitor all appears peace and harmony. The school was placed, by royal decree issued in 1886, under the control of the Department of Industry and Commerce—a decree signed “Umberto I, by the grace of God and the will of the nation, king of Italy,” a wholesome, though courteous, reminder of the tenure of the throne in Italy. But this applies only to the technical and commercial divisions of the school, for the elementary school which forms a part of the institution is administered by the Educational Department, at least, so far as the appointment of teachers and the prescribing of studies are concerned. The direct governing body is a council composed of six members, two of whom are chosen by the minister of industry and commerce, one by the provincial authorities, one by the city of Naples, and one by the Neapolitan Chamber of Commerce; that is, by the various bodies which contribute toward the support of the school. The sixth member of the council is the principal of the institution. The Italians, like the French, believe that young girls should be taught by their own sex; hence the entire staff of the Queen Margherita School, including the principal, are women; and very well fitted for their important work they seemed to be, with the possible exception of the teachers of the foreign languages. In their selection the blunder of selecting Italians had been made.

The council nominates all the teachers of the school, with the

exception, already alluded to, of those who teach the elementary branches, and the minister of industry and commerce confirms or rejects these nominations. The appointment of the elementary staff is a "perquisite" of the Naples School Board. The council draws up the course of study for the commercial and technical divisions of the work, but the minister of education at the capital prescribes the amount and nature of the elementary tasks. Perhaps the harmonious administration of the school is due to a strong executive—a governmental factor which usually makes for peace. The law lays upon the capable shoulders of the principal (called *la direttrice*) about the entire responsibility for the management of the school, and gives her ample power to perform her duties.

The pupils in each section are divided into regular and special students, the former taking complete courses, the latter working only in one "laboratory," as the rooms are called. But special students are required to pass in certain elementary subjects before being admitted to any selected course, though the conditions are not made too difficult for them. All must study the principles of design as applied to the handicraft chosen by them, and, what seems a curious requirement, all must take the laundry course in what is virtually the dainty old art that our grandmothers prettily called "clear-starching." The exquisite white garments made by the students of the school certainly should not be intrusted to unskilled hands.

In addition to administering a commercial school, a technical school, and an elementary school, the principal of the Queen Margherita School is compelled to manage a really complicated business enterprise. For the articles made in the workrooms are sold for the benefit of the institution, commissions are undertaken for the general public, and the work is done at the regular market prices. Estimates as to the cost of the materials supplied are carefully made; the worth of the labor is closely computed, as in mercantile establishments; ledgers are kept, balance sheets struck, and all net profits turned into the school treasury. Every department of the work has its own set of books, in which an account is kept with each individual student of the different technical courses, and in the by-laws of the school the most businesslike rules and regulations governing this side of the work are printed; they look very odd to one accustomed to

the life of the ordinary school of books, but their wisdom is at once apparent. The account of each "laboratory" with the administration of the school is kept in accordance with the strictest forms of commercial procedure, and is in itself a most admirable training for business life. At the beginning of each month a certain appropriation is made for the running expenses, the purchase of material, etc., and the mistress in charge of the department is held to a strict accountability for all expenditures, and required to make a monthly report, and prepare a monthly balance-sheet for the inspection of the council; or a running account, with more frequent balances, may be kept, if this method is, for any reason, considered preferable.

In each "laboratory" a systematic tariff of prices is established, based upon careful calculations of current values of labor and materials, and submitted for the approval of the direction. This tariff may not be changed without the consent of the administrative council. In other words, the Queen Margherita School is a "fixed-price establishment;" and may its righteous influence spread through a land which loves a sliding scale of rates, and adjusts them to fit the supposed wealth and amiability of the purchaser! The head of each department is commanded to uphold a high standard of commercial honor, to insist upon work being completed in the manner and at the time agreed upon, and to inculcate upon every occasion the utmost respect for a promise or an agreement. One marvels at the silence of the Neapolitan labor unions, but it may be that they have progressed far enough to see that a benefit to the daughters of the people can hardly be an injury to the men of their families.

This method of making actual sales and filling genuine commissions has every conceivable advantage, over and above the obvious one of increasing the income of the school. In fact, that may easily be deemed the least of them all. It not only is a training in practical business procedure, but it is an incentive to good work that no possible classroom system of rewards and incentives can hope to rival. The fine old strenuous law of the survival of the fittest comes into play, and the student who sees her own work rejected and her school-mate's accepted has a lesson in the merciless way in which the competition of real life sorts out the lame and the lazy that nothing pedagogic could give. In the hard workaday world there is no

hall-mark of success like a price-mark, and that is the world for which the romantic-looking, but eminently practical, Neapolitans are preparing these girls. The very best, the few really precious, things in this life are without money and without price, but all the second best are tagged; and it is well to accept philosophically the somewhat cheerless truth that our personal value to the community in which we live may be expressed in dollars and cents—or whatever their equivalent is called in the currency of the country. It is also well to endeavor to make that currency value as high as possible and to consider it as a measure of meritorious service rendered to said community. The Wise Book remarks that the laborer is worthy of his hire, and the Queen Margherita School rightly lays the emphasis upon the word “worthy,” knowing well that the hire will follow in due season and proportion. Even this illogical world is not so out of gear that merit and skill wholly escape reward.

Children are admitted to the elementary classes of the school at the age of seven, and for several years their elementary and manual training proceed together. In the higher grades, to which they are admitted at thirteen, the work gradually becomes purely technical, until, as already stated, commissions are undertaken and executed on exactly the same terms as in any mercantile establishment. Great care is exercised in maintaining high moral standards, and the older students are required, upon applying for admission to the school, to present satisfactory proof of previous good conduct. There is an annual fee of five lire (about one dollar) to pay the expenses of the examinations, and a monthly fee of three lire for materials used; but all instruction is gratuitous. The council has one hundred free scholarships at its disposal, and the holders of them are exempted from even these small payments. The scholarships are intended for meritorious pupils whose circumstances are such that the fees, low as they are, would prevent their admission to the school, or the continuance of their studies if they are already on its rolls. In addition to this liberal provision, the principal is empowered to permit, in the cases of deserving and needy students, the appropriation of sums earned by them in the execution of commissions received at the school to the payment of their school fees. This seems to me an admirable arrangement, tending to encourage industry and skill

and to preserve self-respect; and it is to be hoped that, if the much-desired system of technical schools is ever established in this country, some clause of the same sort will be incorporated in the regulations governing such a system. Many of our best and most learned men have "worked their way," as it is called, through college; and if we are ever to have a class of "home-grown" artist-artisans, some provision of the kind for poor and ambitious students will have to be made

After the elementary course, with its prescribed subjects of the regular common school, there is an advanced course of three years. The curriculum provides for further instruction in the mother-tongue, and continues the study of French and English begun in the fifth year of the lower school. The other branches are higher arithmetic, with special attention to commercial methods, ethics, history, geography, applied design, bookkeeping, commercial economy, and law. In reading over the requirements in history, one is inclined to remark that the pupil whose country's story is conventionally supposed to begin with the voyage of a certain famous Genoese to the western world has a decided advantage over the luckless one whose history starts with the foundation of Rome. Italian annals are proud, but very long drawn out indeed, and perhaps youthful patriots of that sunny land would be content with less glory and shorter history lessons.

There is an interesting and unusual course completed in three years and dealing with the standards of the most important articles of merchandise, the tests to determine their grades, the study of their sources, their prevailing prices, the duties upon them, the methods of adulteration, preservation, transportation, manufacture, etc. I do not know whether any of our private commercial schools give such a course or not. Certainly all do not do so, although such knowledge must be most valuable to those entering mercantile life. The course includes the study of food-products, with the chemistry necessary to determine by analysis their adulteration or the substitution of cheaper materials for the more desirable ones. The various means of preserving foods are studied with the effects of these; the division of foods into classes based upon the tissues made and nourished by them; the tests for ascertaining their purity and their fitness

for use; tables giving complete dietaries, and their respective hygienic values; etc. A better course for homemakers can hardly be imagined, yet it is not a course in domestic science, though it might fairly be included in such work. Then there is taken up the study of all the more important kinds of textiles, with an inquiry into their manufacture, their *soffitticazione* as the dishonest substitution of an inferior material for a superior one is very suggestively called in Italian, their dyeing, the different styles of weaving, etc. This course is also an elective one, and the large number of electives seems to me a distinctly excellent thing in a technical school. Whatever any large and important group of trades has in common could be studied by all who decide to take any subject of the group, but full opportunity for a most practical specializing should be afforded, if such a school is to attain to the full standard of usefulness.

In connection with the commercial school there is a school of telegraphy, where instruction is given in the theory upon which this use of electricity is based, in the actual management of the instruments, and in the transmission and receiving of messages in Italian and in foreign languages. The students in this division continue their work in arithmetic, French, and the mother-tongue, and in the use of the typewriter. A rapid, legible, and graceful handwriting, dignified by the term *calligrafia*, is demanded of all the students in the school above the elementary grades, and instruction and practice in the art are continued until graduation. If this were the case in our own high schools, perhaps their pupils might write as well upon leaving them as they now write in the upper classes of the elementary schools.

In the use of the needle the instruction is most thorough. The course is an exacting one, and girls who begin it must be at least thirteen years old, and must already have acquired a certain amount of skill in the handling of that small but effective implement. The subjects included in this division are dressmaking (cutting, fitting, and designing), embroidery in silk, gold, linen, and cotton thread, lacemaking, the mending of lace and other delicate fabrics, and the making of the most exquisite lingerie. The ever-present applied art forms a compulsory part of these courses—design applied, that is, to the requirements of the particular handicraft to which the student is

devoting her attention; design in the concrete, not in the abstract. This is design brought down to the earth and harnessed to the plain, heavy car of a livelihood; not design floating in mid-air, harnessed only to a few "glittering generalities," called, when alluded to at all, the laws of ornamentation. The use of many kinds of machines is also taught—the ordinary sewing-machine, the embroidering- and button hole-making variety of machines, etc.—some of them power-machines, only directed, not run, by the operator.

The course in dressmaking and the making of fine lingerie takes five years. It includes the designing of patterns, styles, and trimmings, and graduates from it are experts, capable of turning out beautiful garments. However, these artists are not so fortunate as their comrades who graduate from the French technical schools, for in Italy it must be easier to find someone to make these dainty robes than to find anyone to wear them with an air. The Italian women, lovely as many of them are, seem destitute of that vague, but perfectly recognizable, quality called "style."

In embroidery the work is admirable, and true artistic feeling is often displayed and genuine talent discovered. The advanced students work from their own designs, and the entire course is a four-year one, though the embroidery of white stuffs alone is learned in three years.

Lacemaking has long been an important industry of the Italian women, and one in which Queen Margherita has manifested great interest. Several of the most successful schools in the country were established by her, and many of the old patterns, stitches, and varieties of lace have been, through her efforts, virtually rediscovered. Pleasant stories are told of the beautiful queen's search for those capable of giving instruction in some of the almost forgotten arts of the lacemaker's graceful craft, and it is said that on the island of Burano, lying far out on the sleepy lagoons which stretch between Venice and the mainland (*terra firma*, as the Venetians call the peninsula of Italy, implying that their fairy city floats in reality as it does in seeming), only one frail old survivor of the days in which lacemaking was a part of every girl's training yet lingered. But she remained with her pupils long enough to obey her queen and transmit her skill to a new generation of workers, before she laid her

weary old bones down to rest in the quaint island *campo santo*. And a blessed field it must seem in all reality to those tired peasants!

The technical terms of the art of Arachne are very impressively technical, and not to be understood of any but the esoteric. But the results appeal to all with a sense of beauty, and, lovely as the frostlike grace of the "point" laces are, the exquisite colorings of the characteristic Venetian laces render them dangerous rivals. These examples of the lacemaker's deftness are a combination of embroidery and true lace-weaving, and afford an opportunity for the designer's skill wider in its range because of the employment of silken threads of brilliant hues, all softened, however, in their artistic mingling like the colors in eastern fabrics. One notes with a smile that the course of study frankly calls for instruction in the imitation of antique laces, and one hopes that the girls of the Queen Margherita School will live up to the high standard of commercial honor inculcated in that institution, and will never attempt to induce future patrons to believe that laces made by their own very modern fingers are what the dealers call "genuine antiques."

Design as applied to lace receives special attention, and, as in the embroidery course, the advanced classes work from their own patterns. The styles of lace at various periods are studied and reproduced, and designs for the manufacture of machine-made laces are prepared. The repairing and restoration of valuable antique laces are one of the subjects of the course.

Instruction in the making of artificial flowers is completed in three years, and, like all the other handicrafts, is accompanied by a compulsory course in design applied to that particular art. A very dainty and pleasing art it is, too; for flowers form the subject-matter of the curriculum. They are studied from life, their very habits of growth all noted; from pictures; from famous conventionalizations; and, in the fourth year, students are required to make water-color sketches of the flowers which they model. These color-studies constitute the patterns from which they work, and they are accurate to a most wonderful degree. The materials employed advance in richness from the paper and batiste of the beginners to the silk and velvet of the older students, and the mounting of these flowers into wreaths, garlands, and garnitures adapted to various charming pur-

poses of ornamentation is part of the instruction. Nothing can be more picturesque than a "laboratory" in the Queen Margherita School in which a class in embroidery or flower-making is at work. The rich colors of the materials used, the young students of the brilliant brunette type common in Naples, the graceful background afforded by the fine old building, all make a scene not easily forgotten. Picturesque as the ancient convent is, however, it may be doubted whether it is as comfortable as one of our—usually—ugly brick boxes. It is not always summer, even in Naples, and when the *tramontana* blows, these lofty old stone rooms and halls must be chilly places.

A commendable desire was shown by some of the students to practice their English, and an impish and appreciative delight was manifested when their English teacher—an Italian, by the way—confined her conversation with the American visitors to the ordinary salutations, turning with a very evident relief to address the Italian lady who accompanied the Transatlantic guests. Just real girls, in spite of their romantic and mediæval setting! The final examinations were going on at the time of my visit, and the same subdued excitement and anxiety prevailed that all pedagogues recognize at once. The examinations are conducted by a peculiar system of committees, a system which, however, seemed to the visitors to have certain unmistakable merits. The committee for the promotion examinations is made up of the teacher to whose class the student is to be promoted, the teacher whose class she is leaving, and a delegate from the governing council. This dignitary must, at times, be compelled to assume the disagreeable duties of an umpire, unless Italian teachers differ widely from American ones. The graduation examinations are conducted by a committee composed of the teacher of the subject, a delegate from the council, and a representative of the minister of industry and commerce. The best graduation theses, almost always upon some purely technical topics, are kept in the archives of the school; this is provided for by a clause in the charter of the institution and is a much-coveted honor. It appears to me a very excellent plan, and one conducive to a scientific study of the art practiced by the writers of these monographs, and calculated to dignify the work in the eyes of the workers, always "a consummation

devoutly to be hoped for." The distribution of all diplomas and prizes, whenever they may have been earned, takes place on November 20, the birthday of Queen Margherita. This certainly is a pretty way to honor the much-loved patroness of the school.

In addition to the council, which administers the affairs of the institution, there is a board of inspectors composed of ten gentlemen annually elected by the council. Their duties are to visit the school, to assist its students and teachers by advice, to encourage by praise and to warn by criticism, to make known the merits and advantages of the instruction given in the institution, and to procure among their families and friends as many commissions as possible which may be executed in the various classes; to sum it all up in a phrase from the vocabulary of an irreverent folk, "to boom the stock" of the Queen Margherita School. Not a bad idea, particularly as expressed with a dignified and impressive circumlocution in the laws governing that institution.

The ideals of the school are high, the training is both thorough and intensely, wisely, practical, and the social needs ministered to are vitally important. The Neapolitans are under no delusion as to the future of the girls who study at the Queen Margherita School; everyone knows that they are to grow up into no human lilies of the field who are neither to toil nor to spin. A life of hard work is before them, and the best and truest kindness is to prepare them for it. They are to be wage-earners—then fit them for that earning in such a manner that those wages may be as high as possible. When is that same condition to be faced as frankly in our systems of popular education? When are we to confess that, although we have, theoretically at least, no caste in this country, the probabilities are that the majority of our pupils will earn their living with their hands? And a highly honorable and important way it is of paying for one's "keep" in this world. Why do not our schools, above the sixth school year, begin to differentiate the training which is to be given to those who are to enter the professions from that at the service of those who are to join the ranks of what is termed "skilled labor"? If the vocations are to be so widely unlike, why is the schooling identical? Eight years of elementary and four years of secondary work, almost exclusively out of books, and all as similar as if we were all to be

pundits, and without the slightest reference either to the individual and natural abilities of the pupil or to his family circumstances! We have not a score of technical high schools in the country; and even the few we have are much more "high" than technical; while the manual training in the elementary schools is only slowly, and in the face of much abuse and misrepresentation as "fads," gaining ground in a few enlightened parts of the land. Manual training is not, in any sense, technical training, though it forms a valuable preparation for it in the upper schools. The aims of the one are disciplinary, developmental; those of the other are utilitarian, vocational. And a stupid snobbishness, an unwillingness to admit the declaration that all of us are born free and equal meant merely, if it meant anything, free to obey the law and equal under its protecting shield. If we are ever to have a native-born class of artist-artisans—a vastly important element in any community—we shall have to develop it through the adoption of a system of honored technical schools. Honored they must be, and properly and generously equipped and maintained; and then perhaps we may slowly attain unto a national sense of the joy of workmanship and the beauty of effective execution and design.